

UNITED STATES ALLOCATED \$3.8 BILLION TO AVIAN FLU PREPAREDNESS

WASHINGTON, APRIL 5 -- The U.S. Department of State, through the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, issued a fact sheet April 4 on international partnerships to meet the threat of avian influenza.

According to the fact sheet, the United States is concerned that ongoing outbreaks of the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus in birds have the potential to turn into a human influenza pandemic that would have significant global health, economic and social consequences.

The United States has allocated \$3.8 billion in emergency funding to address the threat of avian and pandemic influenza domestically and internationally, the fact sheet said.

Text of the fact sheet follows:

"If left unchallenged, this virus could become the first pandemic of the 21st century. We must not allow that to happen."

- President George W. Bush

The U.S. Government is concerned that the ongoing outbreaks of avian influenza in birds have the potential to turn into a human influenza pandemic that would have significant global health, economic, and social consequences. It has allocated \$3.8 billion in emergency funding to address the threat of avian and pandemic influenza domestically and internationally.

WORLDWIDE PROBLEM

To date, outbreaks of the H5N1 strain of avian influenza have been confirmed among birds in nearly 50 countries, 28 of which reported outbreaks since the beginning of 2006. Official figures from the World Health Organization put the number of human cases at around 200 and the number of deaths at over 100.

Avian influenza has occasionally spread from bird to human, but there is no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission at this time. An effective vaccine for humans has not yet been approved.

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

President Bush announced the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza during the UN General Assembly in September 2005. Its goals are to:

- Elevate the avian influenza issue on national agendas.
- Coordinate efforts among donor and affected nations.
- Mobilize and leverage resources.
- Increase transparency in disease reporting and the quality of surveillance.
- Build local capacity to identify, contain and respond to an influenza pandemic.

The first meeting of the Partnership took place October 6-7 in Washington, DC, hosted by the U.S. Department of State. Top foreign affairs, health and agriculture officials from 88 countries, as well as representatives from eight international organizations, including the World Health Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization, and the World Organization for Animal Health, took part.

The countries and organizations participating committed themselves to work together to combat avian and pandemic influenza and to identify priority areas for further collaboration.

Three general topic areas were covered: surveillance and prevention; preparedness, planning and outreach; and response and containment of avian influenza.

AVIAN INFLUENZA ACTION GROUP

The President's National Strategy assigned to the Department of State the lead role for coordinating the U.S. Government's international efforts in dealing with avian and pandemic influenza. In March 2006, the Department established the Avian Influenza Action Group, which in close collaboration with the Departments of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Homeland Security, Defense, the U.S. Agency for International Development and other agencies leads the Department's international engagement on avian and pandemic influenza.

ASSISTANCE FOR AFFECTED COUNTRIES

At an international donors' conference in Beijing in January, the global community pledged \$1.9 billion to combat avian influenza worldwide. The United States pledged \$334 million, which will help fund overseas programs to develop national plans, diagnostics and lab capacity, stockpiles of protective equipment, communication and other needs.

U.S. DOMESTIC PREPAREDNESS

On November 1, 2005, President Bush unveiled his National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, a plan to strengthen the Government's ability to safeguard the American people in the event of a global pandemic. The strategy is designed to meet three critical goals:

- Detecting human or animal outbreaks that occur anywhere in the world.
- Protecting our people by stockpiling vaccines and antiviral drugs while improving the capacity to produce new vaccines.
- Preparing to respond at the federal, state and local levels in the event an avian or pandemic influenza reaches the United States.

All levels of government are currently formulating plans to implement the strategy.

For more information on the disease and efforts to combat it, see Bird Flu (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/bird_flu.html).

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